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Interreligious Dialogue In The Thought of Benedict XVI: Ecclesiological Foundations and Distinctive Characteristics

A. Addressing Doubts about Interreligious Dialogue

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has been teaching that dialogue with the followers of other religions is a legitimate and necessary component of its mission (DP 2, 38, 77). In line with this teaching, the post-conciliar popes have explicitly stressed the importance of interreligious dialogue (Gioia, *Il dialogo*). However there still lingers among Catholics a certain suspicion that interreligious dialogue may not be that legitimate or necessary after all (DP 4).

Doubts seem even more justified in the face of events that put religion in a bad light, such as the recent emergence in present day Syria of a militant movement that, while claiming the Islamic religion as its foundation, has displayed a degree of violence and cruelty that the world finds shockingly inhuman and unacceptable. At times like these it is not surprising that many people may question the goodness of religion and that Catholics may ask whether and why should time and resources be invested in interfaith relations.

Addressing these doubts was one of the aims of the 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation* which is, to date, the most comprehensive articulation of the Catholic Church's understanding of interreligious engagement, based on Conciliar teaching (DP 4). The confusion experienced by many Catholics derives from the fact that interreligious dialogue seems to contradict the core of the Church's mission, that is to say, the proclamation of the Gospel. As *Dialogue and Proclamation* points out, these doubts are ultimately due to insufficient grounding with regard to the notions of Church, mission and inter-

religious dialogue (DP 52). Joseph Ratzinger–Pope Benedict XVI suggests a concept of interreligious dialogue that derives from the very nature of the Church. From his ecclesiological perspective, the apparent opposition of interreligious dialogue and Gospel proclamation disappears.

A comprehensive appreciation of Benedict XVI’s theology of interreligious dialogue would require considering various factors: for example, how his thought belongs within the historical development of the modern papacy in relationship to the world; his understanding of the task of theology *vis-à-vis* the communication of the faith and the Church’s mission; and his theological assessment of religion and of the religions, especially Judaism and Islam. This paper, however, focuses on one particular aspect, namely the ecclesiological foundations of Benedict XVI’s notion of dialogue. This choice is based on the conviction that by taking the discourse on interreligious dialogue to the ecclesiological level, Benedict XVI has contributed in a very significant way to clarify the Catholic understanding of its nature.

The discussion develops in two main steps. First, while focussing on Ratzinger’s understanding of Church, it shows that *unity* is a comprehensive ecclesiological concept, useful to articulate the Church’s identity, its relationship with humanity and its mission in the world. Consequently, in order to fulfil its mission for the salvation of all, the Church must seek to establish unity with all the various strata of humanity. This demands a variety of approaches, depending on how each stratum relates to the Church.

Then the second step consists in presenting the concept of interreligious dialogue that emerges from this vision of Church. It emerges that the Church’s relationship with the followers of other religions is unique in virtue of the importance of religious experience for human life, and that interreligious dialogue is not only the specific mode of mission in relation to the followers of other religions, but it is also a ministry in the service of all humanity.

B. The Church and Humanity

1. Unity as a Comprehensive Ecclesiological Concept

The Church has always been central to Ratzinger’s theological concerns (“David Schindler on Cardinal Ratzinger’s Ecclesiology”).¹ It was his priority during his pontificate as well. Ratzinger ecclesiological thought began with his doctoral dissertation on the *Church as People and House of God in August-*

¹ David Schindler is the chief editor of *Communio*, the theological journal founded in 1972 by Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac and other like-minded theologians.

tine's doctrine of the Church (Ratzinger, *Volk Und Haus*; Ratzinger, *Milestones* 97-102; Nichols, *The Thought* 17-33). He later contributed significantly to the ecclesiological reflection of Vatican II. Ratzinger's understanding of Church is indebted to Augustine who, while shifting from a more metaphysical theology towards a more historical understanding of the Christian faith, increasingly emphasised the necessity of the Church in its concrete historical form. The influence of the African Church Fathers Tertullian, Cyprian and Optatus of Melvis reinforced Augustine's idea that the historical Church is authentically the Church of Christ (Nichols, *The Thought* 34-41). These Church Fathers stress the fact that Christianity exists not merely in the individual who embraces the faith but also in the visible community of the believers, and strongly emphasise that an individual becomes a Christian not just by a "change of philosophy" but by being immersed in the historical life of the Church. They see, therefore, Christianity as confession of the faith and, at the same time, as practice of love, which is the distinctive mark of the assembly of those who are one in Christ. Being a *communio* of love effected by God rather than a *congregatio* resulting from human initiative, the Church constitutes the *locus* of the real presence of the Risen Christ in history, where the invisible and the visible, the Holy and the human are united and coexist.

Communio is the fundamental category of Ratzinger's ecclesiology. He greatly appreciated the emphasis that the 1985 Bishops' Special Synod placed on the Church as *communio*, and observed that, although the word itself does not appear in the documents of Vatican II, if correctly understood, the term *communio* adequately summarises the essential aspects of the Council's ecclesiology ("The Ecclesiology of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*" 130). Such an understanding of *communio* can be found in the biblical text of 1 John 1:3, which reads: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete."

Ratzinger identifies four points in this passage. First, the content of the Church's proclamation is a living experience of encounter with Christ; second, the purpose and the effect of the proclamation is to bring others into the fellowship-communion of the Church; third, communion with the Church is fellowship-communion (participation) in the life of the Trinity; fourth, this communion is the fullness of joy. In other words the personal encounter with Christ from which the Church arises is at the same time also the content of the Church's proclamation. When a person encounters Christ through the Church's proclamation and believes in him, he/she enters simultaneously into *vertical communio* with God and into *horizontal communio* with all those who are in communion with God through Christ. The *communio* among the faithful

(horizontal dimension) does not result from mutual agreement but from their personal act of conversion to Christ by which their personal communion with God is established (vertical dimension). Thus the vertical *communio* is fundamental for the horizontal dimension, the communion embodied in the Church is an essential element of the divine salvific process.²

A further characteristic of *communio* emerges from chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, which according to Ratzinger describes the “interior beginnings of the Church” effected by the Holy Spirit. Acts shows that since the inception of the Church all humanity is the intended beneficiary of its proclamation (Benedict XVI, *Message for the Naming*). Consequently, *communio*, which is both the source and the goal of proclamation, is also intended for all. This universal orientation of communion belongs to the essence of the Church and must be reflected in the Church’s life and ministry at all levels and especially in the ministry of Peter’s successor (Viviano, “The Petrine Office”).

Communio is simultaneously a metaphysical and a historical reality. This identification (between the Church of Christ and the historical Church) emerged with even greater clarity from Ratzinger’s eucharistic ecclesiology. Aidan Nichols points out that, influenced by Henri De Lubac, Ratzinger was one of the first Catholic theologians to produce a systematic elaboration of a eucharistic ecclesiology (*The Thought* 96-99).³ Eucharistic ecclesiology is based on the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ. This perspective appeared in the years following the First World War, when a new awareness emerged within the Catholic Church that the Church is not merely an organisation and an external structure but, above all, an interior and spiritual reality.

According to the First Letter to the Corinthians, *communio* is historically enacted in the Eucharist, which is the *koinonia* with the Body and the Blood

² Ratzinger insists on the priority of the vertical over the horizontal dimension against “horizontalist” interpretations of *communio* that tend to overemphasise the role of human activity in the constitution of the Church. He points out that this happened with regard to the concept of the “People of God” in the years following Vatican II, when “people” was understood by some not according to the biblical meaning but in the perspective of Communist political ideology (“The Ecclesiology of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*,” 125).

³ The development of eucharistic ecclesiology in twentieth-century Catholic thought was influenced by the theological reflection of Nicholai Afanasiev (1893-1966), Russian Orthodox theologian associated with the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge in Paris. In a thorough examination of scriptural and patristic data, Afanasiev retrieved what he thought was the original understanding of the Church as the eucharistic assembly of those who by baptism have been given the Holy Spirit and made one in Christ. As a consequence, every aspect of the Church can be authentically understood in the light of the Eucharist. Afanasiev was part of the ecumenical *ressourcement* group of scholars, which included Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, Oscar Cullman and Henri de Lubac among others, and was invited to the Second Vatican Council as an official ecumenical observer. He is credited in the Acts of the Council for contributing to the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*. In this regard see Plekon (“Introduction”), Nichols (*Theology*) and Nichols (“The Appeal”).

of the Lord that generates *koinonia* among those who partake of it: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one Bread, we who are many are one body.” (1 Cor 10:16-17)

The Church is therefore a *concrete unity* that has its source and apex in the Eucharist. In Ratzinger’s words, the Church as the Body of Christ is “the organism of the Holy Spirit, something alive, that embraces us all from within” (“The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council” 3). It is a reality that “grows from the inside outwards” and “takes shape in the life of prayer, in the life of the sacraments; in the fundamental attitudes of faith, hope and love.” (Ibid., 5)

The concept of Body of Christ expresses the concreteness of *communio* in the Church. “Christ has built himself a body,” and a person can embrace him by becoming a member of his Body because “Christ exists not purely ideally but only in his body.” This means that one embraces Christ together “with the others, with the community that has persisted through the ages and that is this body of his.” (Ibid.) The category of Body of Christ also implies the idea of historical development of the *communio*. As the human body grows by constantly replacing its cells while nevertheless remaining the same person, so does the Church. As the human body lives by integrating new elements within its structure by transforming them into itself, so does every historical development of the Church continuously become part of its being (Ibid.). In this sense *communio* is a dynamic reality, inseparable from *Tradition*.

In the writings of Paul and of the Church Fathers, the Body of Christ is connected to the notion of Eucharist. From their perspective, to conceive of the Church as Body of Christ means understanding it through the Eucharist. Ratzinger explains that the Eucharist is the Church’s foundational event because at the Last Supper Jesus fulfilled the ancient covenant of Sinai, thus accomplishing the ultimate “community of blood and life between God and Man.” (Ibid.) Since that event, those who participate in the Eucharist are bound together in virtue of their communion with Christ, and their communion extends through the ages. The resulting Body of Christ is both the condition of possibility and the historical realization of *communio* (between Man and God, and Man and Man). This means, again, that it is through the visible Church that God calls other men and women throughout history to enter in communion with Christ and offers them the possibility to do so. Because God’s offer of communion takes place within history, the *interior* reality of the Church requires its *external* structure and ministry. These acquire validity exclusively from their being in the service of the mission, which is to serve God and to serve humanity for the transformation of the world (Ibid.).

The ecclesiological categories of *communio* and of Body of Christ point to a Church that exists in order “to become God’s dwelling place in the world,” whose task is to make God’s presence visible by pursuing a life of *holiness* in the sense of *conformity to God*. From the perspective of Ratzinger’s eucharistic ecclesiology, the Church is the means chosen by God to establish and maintain God’s relationship with humanity. By choosing it and entrusting it with a mission, despite its limitations and even its sinfulness, God makes the Church essential to his plan of salvation (Ibid.).

For Ratzinger, *communio* means the unity of the Body of Christ, which is effected by God but also requires that, in order to be preserved, the faithful practise Christian *caritas* in obedience to Christ’s commandment of mutual love. According to Ratzinger, only a Church that is united (or at least striving for unity) can fulfil its God-given mission. It is by being a *sacrament of unity*, i.e. a sign and instrument of unity, that the Church remains faithful to its true nature and fulfils its role in salvation history. In other words, unity among the believers in Christ is essential to the authentic Church of Christ, with evident ecumenical consequences. From the perspective of Ratzinger’s eucharistic ecclesiology, unity as an ecclesiological category does not apply exclusively to the internal reality of the Catholic Church but extends to the relationships between the Catholic Church and all Christians outside its communion. The pursuit of unity with other Christians, therefore, is necessary to the being of the Catholic Church. Benedict XVI consistently put this theological idea into praxis and explicitly set ecumenical engagement as a priority of his pontificate (*First Message* 697-698).

2. The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Humanity

Unity has emerged so far as the key aspect of the Church as historical reality. Faithfulness to its true identity requires that the Church *be one* through the constant practice of mutual charity among Christians. Since the salvation offered to all humanity consists in becoming one with God by becoming one with Christ through communion with his Body, and because the Church is truly God’s intended instrument of salvation insofar as it perseveres in unity, the soteriological significance of the unity of Christians extends beyond Christianity to all realms of human existence, including that of the followers of other faiths. In other words, God calls *the nations* to partake in the same unity in which the Church already belongs and by which is defined.

This idea needs further reflection. The Church’s mission derives from the nature of the Church as *communio* and Body of Christ. By becoming members of Christ’s Body, the believers also participate in his mission, whose goal is to

save all humanity by bringing it into the original communion with God (Benedict XVI, *Message for the Naming*).

In *Die Einheit der Nationen* (1973), while discussing political theology, Ratzinger considers the early Christians' response to their contemporary pagan authors' thought regarding what constitutes the unity of the nations. His reflection is useful to understand the Church's mission as the extension of Christ's work of restoration of the unity of humanity. Ratzinger observes that an attentive reading of Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on *earth peace to those on whom his favour rests*," reveals the clash between two opposing worldviews. One is the universal *pax* promised by the Roman Empire, which is established and maintained by human power, embodied in the emperor. The other is the universal peace that God bestows on humanity in Jesus Christ (Ratzinger, *L'unitá* 23-24). While the Roman peace ensuring the unity of the different nations within the Roman Empire is a political reality, that is to say a function of the state, the Christian peace is primarily a theological one.

The Christian vision of peace to which Luke refers is based on a crucial aspect of the biblical faith of Israel, namely the fundamental unity of the world and of humanity. This originates from faith in the One God and from belief that the whole of human history is rooted in one man, Adam, and in one common ancestor, Noah. The Old Testament faith connects the oneness of God and the single origin of the human race. These constitute the foundations of the unity of humanity, which exists since the beginning under the unconditional care of the Creator (*Ibid.*, 24-25).

Ratzinger points out that, according to the biblical vision, the fragmentation of humanity signified by the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), is not God's will but a consequence of human sinfulness. On the contrary, according to his original plan, God wants humanity to be one and, after Babel, desires its reunification. In the Old Testament the restoration of lost unity is symbolised by the vision of God's gathering the nations in Jerusalem, in his presence and in common worship of him (Benedict XVI, *Message for the Naming*). The unity that was lost by human sin cannot be restored by political means, but is ultimately God's doing.

Taking a further step, Ratzinger notes that, while building on the Old Testament vision of universal peace, the New Testament further highlights the contrast between the political and theological notions through the doctrine of the two Adams (Romans 5:12-21). This rests on the idea that, prior to the Christ-event, humanity existed in a non-definitive, imperfect state, because it bore the "mark of its defective origin." The coming of Christ and the inauguration of a new humanity have transcended such state once and for all (*L'unitá* 26-27). The "second and definitive humanity" is the community of Christians, which does not yet comprise all of "ancient humanity" but grows progressively with-

in it, renewing it from inside (Ibid.,28-29). This means that until the fulfilment of history, the first fragmented humanity and the new humanity must coexist.

How then is the Church to relate to the world? Ratzinger turns to Origen and Augustine's thought for a patristic assessment of the *nations*. Origen saw their existence a sign of Satan's influence over humanity, which calls for the work of Christ, understood in terms of reconciliation. On the basis of Deuteronomy 32:8, Origen formulates the idea that after the fragmentation of humanity each nation was left under the power of an angel or supernatural ruler.⁴ In Origen's view, these supernatural rulers, the *archontes*, are ultimately demons. While all other peoples are under the power of evil forces, however, Israel is governed directly by God and, therefore, holds a unique mission among the nations. Origen explains Israel's mission on the basis of Exodus 1:1-6, interpreting the migration of the seventy Israelites to Egypt as the true Israel sent to rescue humanity from the rule of the *archontes*, from national fragmentation, and to bring it back into unity under God's rule (*L'unitá* 57). Israel's mission is fulfilled in the Church, the new fatherland of Christians representing true humanity (Ibid.). In Origen's view, national identities are ultimately evil but can nevertheless function as a preparation for the salvation given through Christ. What is really important for Origen is to oppose the "subordination of the sacred and holy to the political and national element" (Ibid.,71).

Shaped by a very different historical situation, Augustine's view of politics and national identity is less negative than Origen's. He nonetheless agrees that, while it is highly commendable for Christian citizens to work for the good of the nation (the Roman Empire), their primary duty is to "employ all *their* energy for the eternal goal that had become visible and accessible to him in Jesus Christ" (Ibid.,96). The Christian's true fatherland is not the State but the Heavenly City, which transcends national identities and reunites fragmented humanity. For Augustine, Pentecost is the antithesis of Babel. In Ratzinger's words, for Augustine, becoming a Christian means "to go from dispersion into unity, from the Babel tower into the Room of Pentecost, from the many peoples of humanity into the one single new people" (Ibid.,109; *Message for the Naming*). This means that the reunification of humanity is already happening in the historical Church. According to Ratzinger, the aim of Augustine's doctrine of the two cities is not to eliminate the distinction between the Church and the State, by promoting a Christian theocracy, but to express with renewed strength the twofold belief that "the unity of humanity (realised) in the body of Christ" is a "transforming element" in history, and that "the full form" of

⁴ Deuteronomy 32:8 reads: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples, according to the number of the sons of Israel." (Or "sons of God", according to the Septuagint, the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls).

such unity “will be established by God, once present history reaches its end” (*L’unità* 111).

The City of God is the Church, i.e. the “sacramental-eschatological” reality that “lives in this world as a sign of the future world” (Ibid.,113). In other words, the historical Church, with its finitude and limitations, is the pre-figuration and anticipation of God’s kingdom, where all the nations will be finally one at the end of time. The Church, therefore, has a sacramental significance for the salvation of the world which, in light of Ratzinger’s reflection, can be concretely understood in terms of restoring the *unity of the nations*.

3. Christian Brotherhood and Degrees of Unity

Two notions of unity have emerged so far from Ratzinger’s ecclesiological reflections: the unity of the Church and the unity of humanity. Because the Church exists for the salvation of humanity, the two notions are related. What can be said theologically about their connection? Ratzinger’s discussion on the meaning of Christian brotherhood makes it possible to articulate the relationship of the Church with humanity in terms of degrees of unity, which is useful in order to appreciate the universal implications of Christian unity (Ratzinger, *The Meaning*).

Ratzinger observes that, according to New Testament testimony, the Christian community understood itself as a brotherhood from its earliest stages. This was a development of the notion of brother present in the Old Testament where the term applies predominantly to the Israelite co-religionist. Brothers are those who *belong in the unity* of God’s Chosen People. Brotherhood is therefore defined not in terms of blood ties but in terms of shared divine election. As a consequence, embedded in the notion of brotherhood is the idea of separation from outsiders, who are not chosen and whom the Old Testament calls the *goyyim* (the Hebrew for non-Israelites, corresponding to the Greek *ethnē*, nation, race or people).

Within the faith of Israel, there is a clear sense of being different from outsiders, which is nevertheless balanced by the conviction that Israel’s *national God* is at the same time the God of all humanity. As a result, while the outsider is not a member of the brotherhood of Israel, and therefore does not have the same claims on the Israelite as does co-religionist, the fact that Israel and the rest of humanity belong to the same God places an ethical responsibility on the Israelites, who are aware of their divine election, towards those who have not been chosen. This balancing element prevents, at least in principle, Israel’s self-awareness as divinely chosen from becoming an exclusivistic attitude *vis-à-vis* God’s offer of salvation to the rest of humanity.

So, intrinsic in the Old Testament notion of brotherhood is the tension between election and universalism. For Ratzinger, the latter is rooted in the two covenants of the Book of Genesis: on the one hand, God's covenant with Adam, which was renewed with Noah, the father of restored humanity after the Flood; on the other hand, God's covenant with Abraham and Moses by which Israel is constituted as God's People. As the Abrahamic-Mosaic covenant does not invalidate God's first covenant with humanity, the universal scope of God's salvific will and the election of Israel constitute, according to Ratzinger, a "duality" that "could never degenerate into dualism," because the tension between the two is not opposition (Ratzinger, *The Meaning* 11). Indeed, the Scriptures show that when Israel's sense of separation from humanity does result in the identification of the scope of God's salvific will with Israel, this is challenged by the notion of the universal God, who wishes the salvation of all (Ibid., 7-8). In fact, the faith of Israel allows for the possibility of salvation for those who are not bound by the Torah, as long as they live out God's will by observing the *Noahide Laws*.⁵

The Israelites have an ethical responsibility not only towards each other but also towards humanity, as is clearly laid out in the laws regarding strangers in Exodus (22:20; 23:9), Deuteronomy (14:29), Leviticus (19:33f; 19:10; 23:22) and Numbers (9:14; 15:14ff; 35:15). In fact, there are, as Ratzinger defines them, two "zones of brotherhood" in the faith of Israel: a direct brotherhood and an indirect one. Both place specific demands on the believers (*The Meaning* 10-11). According to Ratzinger, this "duality that is never permitted to become dualism" is present in an Old Testament motif that he calls "theology of the two brothers." At crucial points of salvation history stand exemplary couples of brothers, one of whom is chosen while the other is not: Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob. Ratzinger observes that this dynamic of election-rejection never results in the loss of "brotherhood." In fact, it appears that "even the partners of Israel who were expelled from the election could yet be understood in a wider sense as *brothers*, that even the one who was rejected remained a *brother*" (*The Meaning* 11).

Both the New Testament and the writings of the Church Fathers inherit and develop the Old Testament notion of brotherhood, except that they place stronger emphasis on universal salvation (*The Meaning* 21-40). There exists a core of humanity that is the representative of entire humanity in its relationship with God. This core is now the Church (the chosen brother), which holds a role of mediation in the salvation of the rest (the *estranged* brother). Ratz-

⁵ *Nohaide* or *Nohachian Laws* is the Jewish Talmudic designation for the seven biblical laws given by God to Adam and Noah before the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai and they are therefore binding on all humanity (Lundgren 721).

inger identifies the following four aspects of Christian brotherhood which help to understand such a role.

First, the Christian brotherhood is based on the divine sonship of Jesus. Only Christ can be rightfully called Son of God, since he is the “epitome of the true Israel” (Ibid.,48). The ultimate aim of the Incarnation is “to make what is his (own) available to all,” which is his divine sonship (Ibid.,49). Therefore, by becoming a disciple, i.e. one with Christ, the believer becomes a child of God by participating in Christ’s sonship. Consequently, all believers become *brothers* (and *sisters*) in virtue of their common participation in Christ’s sonship. In the light of eucharistic ecclesiology, the three notions – communion with Christ, incorporation in his Body and becoming the Christian brotherhood – are different facets of a single event. This is not only a sacramental but also an ethical process by which, called to “break up his own merely private ego and merge into the unity of the body of Christ,” the believer becomes like Christ who is totally Other-centred (Ibid., 55).

Second, as a result, the barriers of division within the Christian brotherhood are removed. Paul defines the community of believers as the new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-17), in which the contradictions of the old order are overcome and “the great unbridgeable difference which had divided the world now loses its meaning – the difference between Israel and the heathen, between pure and impure, between elect and non-elect” (*The Meaning* 57). According to Paul, Christ’s work is essentially a cosmic act of reconciliation (cf. Ephesians 2:12-17), so that, as Ratzinger explains, it can be said that the “mystery of Christ is the mystery of the removal of barriers:” religious, social (Galatians 3:27-28), and national (Colossians 3:10-11) (*The Meaning* 58).

Third, the distinctive identity of Christian brotherhood inevitably becomes a barrier of separation from outsiders. After examining the New Testament usage of the term *brother*, Ratzinger concludes that according to the Scripture “only the limited application of the idea of brotherhood is Christian” (*The Meaning* 67). In the New Testament, the term brother is used in two ways: in relation to Jesus and in relation to the disciples. When Jesus speaks of his brothers, he generally means his disciples, but in Matthew 25:31-46 he speaks of all men and women in need as his *adelphoi* (brothers). While *outsiders* are *brothers* of Jesus Christ, however, they are never described as *brothers* of the believers. The Christian brotherhood is clearly determined by each individual’s decision to become a disciple, one with Christ and a member of the Church. From this perspective, the celebration of the Eucharist is the “sacrament of brotherhood” (Ibid.,68). For Paul, explains Ratzinger, true *brotherhood* requires its visible enactment in the liturgy and the life of the community. This is so important that for those “who have been baptised but have lost the living

faith and thus any direct sharing in Christian brotherhood,” he uses a different term: *pseudo-adelphoi* (Ibid., 72-74).⁶

Fourth, despite its clear demarcation, the Christian faith prevents the *separateness* of the brotherhood from becoming sectarian isolation. According to Ratzinger, “[t]he separating off of the Christian brotherhood is not the creation of some esoteric circle, but is intended to serve the whole. The Christian brotherly community does not stand against but for the whole” (*The Meaning* 72-74).

Hence, the distinctiveness-separation of the Christian brotherhood constitutes the condition of possibility of true Christian universalism, in the sense that clear self-identity enables Christian brotherhood to recognize otherness, namely, that portion of humanity standing outside the brotherhood, the *estranged brother* for whose salvation the Christian is held accountable in virtue of Christ’s work. Because the goal of Christ’s work is the salvation of the whole, by necessity this must be reflected in the work of his Body (*The Meaning* 72-74). Thus, true universalism, i.e. taking full responsibility for the salvation of all *outsiders* (the entirety of humanity), belongs to the very nature of the Christian brotherhood. This ecclesiology has very significant implications in relation to interreligious dialogue. Ultimately the question of Christian brotherhood is the question of Christian identity in relation to the other and Ratzinger insists that clarity about one’s identity is a necessary condition for interreligious engagement (Benedict XVI, *Address to the International Jewish* 794-795). This is especially true with regard to the Church’s dialogue with culture and with religions.

While the notion of Church as *communio*-Body of Christ especially highlights the Christian’s responsibility of preserving the unity with co-disciples through the practice of Christian love, the notion of Church as Christian brotherhood as articulated by Ratzinger accentuates responsibility towards outsiders. The theology of the two brothers holds together the distinctive identity of the chosen-brother and the fundamental unity of the chosen-brother with the non-chosen one, and so provides a useful model, entirely consistent with the Christian faith, for articulating the relationship between the Church and non-Christians.

4. The Church and the Other: the Need for Differentiated Approaches

The different degrees of Christian brotherhood and the corresponding different levels and responsibility of the Church for humanity requires that the

⁶ The term appears in 2 Corinthians 11:26 and Galatians 2:4.

Church have the ability to relate adequately to each specific *other*. In other words, in order to be an effective means for the unity of humanity, the Church needs to adopt different approaches according to the particular relationships that link it to the different components of humanity. This idea is consistent with the teaching of Vatican II, particularly *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* (LG 13-17; NAE). It also resonates with Paul VI's definition of various circles of dialogue in *Ecclesiam Suam*, and with the multiple ways within the one mission as presented in John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (RM 41-60).⁷ It also underlies the teaching of *Dialogue and Mission*, whereby mission is described as a "single but complex and articulated reality" (DM 13), and *Dialogue and Proclamation*, which points out that "special attention should be given to the relations with the followers of each religion," because "the various religions differ from each other" (DP 87).

The idea of differentiated approaches corresponding to different levels of unity is also consistent with Benedict XVI's insistence on the distinction between ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and, most importantly, with his thought regarding the Church's relationship towards non-Christians. Non-Christians do not all stand in the same kind of relationship with the Catholic Church. In fact there is a great difference between those whose lives are shaped by religious belief, and those who are non-religious. Moreover, further distinctions should be made within each of these two broad groups. For Benedict XVI, therefore, the Church's engagement with people who have no religious belief is different from its engagement with followers of other faiths, and even within interreligious dialogue the engagement depends on the different religious persuasions of the other dialogue partner (Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity" 15-44).

The idea of Church as brotherhood has bearings in three directions: within the Catholic Church, at the ecumenical level and finally in relation to the non-Christian world, providing a broad ecclesiological foundation for ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and engagement with secular thought respectively.⁸ Pope Benedict XVI identified all of these as priorities for the Church during his pontificate.

At the ecumenical level, Ratzinger believes that while it is not possible, nor would it be helpful, to deny that, strictly speaking, a Catholic and a non-

⁷ In *Ecclesiam Suam* Paul VI distinguishes dialogue with entire humanity (650), which includes those with no religious belief, from dialogue with the followers of Judaism, Islam and of other religions (654); dialogue with other Christians (655) and among Catholics (657).

⁸ As a theologian, Ratzinger has written extensively on ecumenism (Ratzinger, *Principles*, 192-311; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 67-138; Nichols, *The Thought*, 191-197; and de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 189-197). As pope, he often spoke on the topic. One important example is the *Address at the Ecumenical Meeting* in Cologne (August 19, 2005).

-Catholic Christian belong to different brotherhoods, it is nevertheless at least possible to conceive of these brotherhoods as *sister Churches*, on account of the common faith in Christ (*The Meaning* 91).⁹ For Ratzinger, it is indisputable that in virtue of the common faith, Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church are nevertheless *brothers*, albeit *separated*. If the focus is set on *brotherhood* rather than on *separation*, the term *separated brothers* can acquire a positive connotation, signifying that, despite theological and historical divergences, we are still one in the one Christ who brings us together in his brotherhood (Ibid.,94). The fact that Christian brotherhood is possible at various levels means that Christian unity exists *de facto* in different degrees. A smaller degree of unity does not make it less real (Ratzinger, “On the Ecumenical” 262). As Ratzinger explains, full Christian unity is eschatological “in the true sense of the term”, that is to say, “already present and yet within time never perfected” (Ibid.,268). The fact that every Christian Church or community is by definition journeying “on the way towards Christ” means that all Christian communities are already united to the extent to which they strive to be faithful to the Lord. In this sense ecumenism, understood as the common effort to arrive at the fullness of the faith and to “sharing a common faith,” is in itself a mode of unity (Ibid.,268-269). This is one of two reasons why ecumenism is necessary. The other reason concerns the effectiveness of the Church’s mission in the world. According to the Gospel, the Church’s mission succeeds to the extent to which the disciples are bound by Christian love. Ecumenism is about the full realization of the Church’s nature and, as a consequence, about the effectiveness of its mission *vis-à-vis* humanity. From the perspective of the “theology of the two brothers,” Ecumenism is an obligation placed on all Christians so that, as the “brother that has been chosen,” i.e., Christianity may truly be a brother to and take care of the “wayward one” (*The Meaning* 81).

Finally, with regard to the “second zone of brotherhood,” the Church exercises its responsibility in three ways: through direct proclamation of the Christian message; through *agape*, that is, the practice of Christian charity towards all; and through suffering, that is to say, by making itself a neighbour to all and sharing in their sufferings in the Christian hope that these will be overcome

⁹ This usage constitutes a development beyond the New Testament and Tradition, which by ‘sister Churches’ refer to different communities within the *catholica*. With regard to the question of “sister churches,” see Legrand, “La théologie des Églises Sœurs: réflexions ecclésiologiques autour de la déclaration de Balamand.” Also known as the *Balamand Declaration*, the document “Uniatism, method of union of the past, and the present search for full communion,” is a statement by the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church issued on June 23, 1993, during the VII plenary session held in Balamand, Lebanon from June 17-24, 1993.

by the coming of the Kingdom. Ratzinger refers to mission, agape, and suffering, as obligations of the Christian towards the non-Christian (*The Meaning* 81-84). Proclamation must be carried out openly and confidently, he says, but with “holy discretion.” This means having the ability to proclaim the Word at the right time, when the conditions for its being heard are in place (Ibid.,82). It implies the dialogical attitude of careful listening to the reality of the other. *Agape* is enacted in two ways: through relationships of mutual love among Christians, which have “an attractive and exemplary force constituting an effective act of mission;” and through acts of disinterested love towards every human being, following the example of Christ who “loved those who neither knew nor loved him (cf. Rom 5:6), without asking for thanks or response” (Ibid.,82). Lastly, by suffering for others, the Church “achieves its highest mission – the exchange of fate with the wayward brother, and thus the restoration to full sonship and full brotherhood” (*The Meaning* 84).¹⁰ This notion of mission frees the Church from the sense of failure that might emerge when, despite having heard the proclamation of the Christian faith, the *outsider* does not choose to embrace it and enter the Christian brotherhood. According to Ratzinger, in such situations the Church fulfils its responsibility towards humanity by simply *being-a-brother* for all men and women.

C. Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue

1. The Church in Dialogue with Religions

In the light of what has been discussed so far, the different approaches required of the Church in relation to those who belong within the *second zone* of brotherhood can be grouped under the two headings of interreligious dialogue and dialogue with culture. According to Benedict XVI, these are both necessary and important. On the basis of his thought on interreligious dialogue, however, it can be argued that the engagement with religious-humanity has a very distinctive character and bears fruits not only in relation to the followers of other faiths but for all of humanity.

Five years before becoming pope Ratzinger spoke of interreligious dialogue when he presented *Dominus Iesus* (DI), the *Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on August 6, 2000. At the press conference

¹⁰ Ratzinger wrote that the “idea of substitution is one of the primitive facts of the biblical testimony, the rediscovery of which in today’s world can help Christianity to renew and deepen in a decisive way the conception it has of itself” (“Substitution” 273).

held on September 5, he described the ecclesial and theological context that occasioned *Dominus Iesus* and spoke of its significance (*Contesto*). Ratzinger carefully distinguished the notion of interreligious dialogue according to the teaching of Vatican II, from an *ideology of dialogue* that has become increasingly widespread among Christians. Consistent with his theological methodology, Ratzinger's definition of interreligious dialogue emerges in response to a concrete challenge – relativism – and is built on the ecclesial tradition, i.e. the Council's documents *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, as well as John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

Ratzinger defines relativism as “the idea that all religions are for their followers equally valid paths of salvation” (*Contesto*). This idea is incompatible with Christian faith because of its presuppositions and their consequences. At the heart of relativism is the idea that the Absolute is ultimately unknowable. An unbridgeable gulf separates the truth from human understanding and experience, thus any revelation of the Absolute – including Jesus Christ – can at most be a reflection of the truth. Consequently, it cannot be claimed that Christ is the truth but only one manifestation of it, which is as imperfect as other revelations and, therefore, must be complemented by them in order to offer a fuller, albeit never complete, picture of the truth. As it holds that the Absolute cannot be known in itself, relativism denies the possibility of an absolute truth, and considers any such claim as fundamentalism, as an “attack against the modern spirit” and a “threat to tolerance and freedom” (*Contesto*). Therefore, Christianity should renounce any Christological truth-claims and accept that it needs the revelations of other religions in order to understand God more fully. Obviously, this is incompatible with the essence of Christian faith for which the historical Jesus of Nazareth is the concrete manifestation of the Absolute.

Relativism, however, constructs its own notions of truth, freedom, tolerance, and ultimately dialogue, which requires:

placing one's position and faith at the same level as the faith and the convictions of others, so that all is reduced to an exchange of positions that are fundamentally equal and therefore relative to one another, with the higher goal of achieving the greater degree of cooperation and integration among the different religious persuasions (*Contesto*, my translation).

This “ideology of dialogue” is incompatible with the Catholic understanding of interreligious dialogue as “the way to discover the truth” and the process by which “one discloses to the other the hidden depth of what he or she has apprehended in his or her religious experience, which waits to be fulfilled and purified in encountering the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ” (*Ibid.*).

While the notion of interreligious dialogue held by the Catholic Magisterium does not contradict the Church's duty to preach the Gospel and invite others to communion with Christ by entering the Church, the relativistic idea of dialogue does.

In line with the Church's teaching, Ratzinger understands interreligious dialogue as originating from the longing for the truth that is present in Christianity and indeed in every religion. The ultimate, theological foundation of interreligious dialogue is the truth of God, which Christians recognise as fully manifested in Christ. Vatican II acknowledged the presence of elements of truth in all cultures and faiths, and *Nostra Aetate 2* teaches that as Catholics engage in dialogue with the followers of other religions, their duty is to "recognize, preserve and promote" these elements. Because the truth is one, and is fully revealed in Christ, these elements of truth must be the work of the Spirit (RM 29). Dialogue understood as seeking to recognize the elements of truth present in the other faiths is, as Ratzinger explains, the only notion of interreligious dialogue that takes other religions seriously by assuming the presence of the truth within them and recognising their efforts to find it. The Christian recognition of the good elements present in other religions is by necessity done in connection with the mystery of Christ, who is fully present and operative in the Church as Head of the Body. Hence the Church plays a unique role in interreligious dialogue.

In an article published in 1998 and entitled "Interreligious Dialogue and Jewish-Christian Relations," Ratzinger formulated three general theses (29-41). First, he affirmed that religions can only meet each other by "delving more deeply into the truth." In fact, renunciation of the truth "does not elevate man but exposes him to the calculus of utility and robs him of his greatness" (Ibid.,38). As a consequence, the interreligious conversation requires reverence for the other's belief alongside a willingness to seek the truth, in order better to understand one's beliefs by understanding the other's, and to "be furthered on the path of God" (Ibid.).

Second, this implies that, in the interreligious encounter, "we cannot and must not dispense with criticism" both of the other's and also of our own tradition which must be "unceasingly purified by the truth" ("Interreligious Dialogue" 39).

Lastly, interreligious dialogue is "not random conversation, but aims at persuasion, at discovering the truth. Otherwise it is worthless." It must not preclude the sincere communication of one's conviction. Such communication must nonetheless be a "dialogical event" because "we are not saying something that is completely unknown to the other," rather we are "disclosing the hidden depth of what he already touches in his own belief." For this reason, Ratzinger believes that interreligious dialogue "should increasingly become

a listening to the Logos, who shows us unity in the midst of our divisions and contradictions” (“Interreligious Dialogue” 40-41).

In his capacity as pope, on several occasions Benedict XVI has further expounded on the notion of interreligious dialogue. Three of his speeches are particularly important not only because they focus directly on the value of religions and interreligious dialogue but also because they are addressed directly to people of other faiths. They were delivered at Benedict’s meetings with representatives of other religions in Washington on April 17, 2008, in Sydney on July 8, 2008 and in London on September 17, 2010 respectively. His papal teaching on interreligious dialogue is marked by two characteristics: first, it is visibly imbued with the spirit and doctrine of *Nostra Aetate*, often reflected in his choice of words. Second, it is characterised by a positive, generous and creative effort to affirm the value of religion and religions at levels that prescind from the question of their salvific value, which in recent decades has often become the main and sometimes exclusive focus of discussion on other religions and their interactions with the Church.

2. The essence of interreligious dialogue: the common quest for the truth

According to Benedict XVI, the aim of interreligious dialogue defines its nature as well as its characteristics both at the theoretical and the practical level. Building on Church teaching and in line with his previous theological reflection, he defines the ultimate purpose of interreligious dialogue as a common quest for the truth (*Address in Washington* 329). By doing so, Benedict XVI takes interreligious dialogue beyond the level of shared values, and identifies its deepest foundation at the level of truth. Those who engage in interreligious dialogue cannot stop at the discovery of convergent values but must go further to explore “their ultimate foundation,” by listening together to the voice of truth. In this sense interreligious dialogue is a process of learning together, in obedience to the truth (*Ibid.*,330).

The ultimate goal must always be kept present, even when the dialogue is still at its early stages and focused on what Benedict XVI calls its “intermediate” goals. One goal, for example, is seeking “a consensus regarding ways to implement practical strategies for advancing peace” (*Ibid.*,329). Benedict XVI sees the effort towards peace among peoples as a most urgent “duty to which all people must be committed, especially those who profess to belong to religious traditions” (*Address to the Delegates* 743). Peace-building, however, is not the ultimate end of interreligious dialogue. Actually, Benedict XVI insists that the quest for the truth is the foundation of true peace, because “wherever and whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendour of truth, they

naturally set out on the path of peace” (*In Truth Peace*). The efforts of religious people, therefore, to “come together and foster dialogue are a valuable contribution to building peace on solid foundations” (*Address to the Delegates* 743). In this regard Benedict XVI said that:

our quest for peace goes hand in hand with our search for meaning, for it is in discovering the truth that we find the road to peace. Our effort to bring about reconciliation between peoples springs from, and is directed to, that truth which gives purpose to life. Religion offers peace, but more importantly, it arouses within the human spirit a thirst for truth and hunger for virtue (*Address in Sydney*).

Cooperation for the promotion of human life, of integral human development and of religious freedom are other examples of “intermediate goals” to interreligious dialogue, whose significance is not to be underestimated. These belong to interreligious dialogue, nevertheless, as implications of the quest for truth, because this is where the meaning of human existence is found. Thus, the promotion of life and religious freedom are forms of the service to the truth that pertains to interreligious dialogue on account of its very nature (*Address in Washington* 330). For Benedict XVI, interreligious dialogue is “a matter of finding ourselves together on this journey towards the truth, of firm commitment to the dignity of man and of taking responsibility together for the cause of peace against every form of violence that destroys rights [*violenza distruttrice del diritto*]” (*Allocutio in die reflexionis* 762).

3. The universality of human experience and the authentic nature of religion as the conditions of possibility for interreligious dialogue

According to Pope Benedict the common humanity of all men and women constitutes an anthropological foundation for interreligious dialogue. The universal character of human experience, which transcends all geographical and cultural boundaries, enables the followers of religions to engage in dialogue as they grapple with the mystery of life’s joys and sufferings (*Address in Sydney*). The value of religion and of different religions ultimately resides in the essence of the human person, whose origin and destiny are in the Absolute, beyond the sphere of empirical reality. Because the *raison d’être* of religions is to understand the ultimate meaning of human existence, the distinctive quality of all religious persons is that:

in our different ways, [we] are personally engaged in a journey that grants an answer to the most important question of all ... concerning the ultimate meaning

of our human existence. The quest for the sacred is the search for the one thing necessary, which alone satisfies the longing of the human heart (*Address in London*).

Thus religions are important because “genuine religious belief points us beyond present utility towards the transcendent.” As a matter of fact, when religion is properly understood, it “brings enlightenment, it purifies our hearts and it inspires noble and generous action, to the benefit of the entire human family” (Ibid.). Religions have a “special role” in the life of people for two reasons: first, because:

the religious sense planted within the human heart opens men and women to God and leads them to discover that personal fulfilment does not consist in the selfish gratification of ephemeral desires. Rather, it leads us to meet the needs of others and to search for concrete ways to contribute to the common good (*Address in Sydney*).

Second, because the “presence and witness [of religious people] in the world points towards the fundamental importance for human life of this spiritual quest in which we are engaged” (*Address in London*).

Religions acquire even greater importance for humanity when people of different faiths speak together. In fact:

the unified voice of religious people urges nations and communities to resolve conflicts through peaceful means and with full regard for human dignity. One of the many ways religion stands at the service of mankind is by offering a vision of the human person that highlights our innate aspiration to live generously, forging bonds of friendship with our neighbours (*Address in Sydney*).

In the contemporary world, the value of religion is often ignored if not denied, especially in the light of religious fundamentalism and atheist culture. When it is not seen as irrelevant to human life, religion is often viewed as a cause of conflict and violence. In this regard, Benedict XVI suggests that if many people are unable to find God today, it is partly the responsibility of believers with a “limited or even falsified image of God” (*Allocutio in die reflexionis* 762). The inner “struggling and questioning” of non-believers “is in part an appeal to believers to purify their faith, so that God, the true God, becomes accessible to others through their witness” (Ibid.).

In this context, “a fundamental task of interreligious dialogue” is to reflect on and manifest the true nature of religion, that is to say, to show that religion can never be used to justify or motivate violence but that its purpose is to show that “rightly-lived orientation of man towards God is a force for peace”

(Ibid.,760-761). For Pope Benedict, “it is important that all faithful oppose with determination and clarity the exploitation of religion as a pretext to justify violence” (*Address to Pekka Ojanen* 9-10).

Religions can effectively exercise their service to humanity, however, only if they are granted freedom. When society acknowledges the spiritual dimension of the human reality, it allows the emergence of “an authentic dialogue between religions and cultures,” because it encourages “a common journey in brotherhood and solidarity” that makes “the integral development of the human being” possible (*Address to Kagefumi Ueno* 4). For Benedict, interreligious dialogue is “authentic and sincere” when it is “built on respect for the dignity of every human person” (*Address to the Delegates* 743).

4. Interreligious dialogue and mission

Contrary to the relativistic argument, a notion of interreligious dialogue constructed on truth does not contradict the missionary proclamation of the Christian faith. In fact, mission flows from the truth that is the foundation of dialogue, in the sense that “the one who has recognised a great truth, discovered a great joy, must pass it on, and absolutely cannot keep it for him/herself” (Benedict XVI, *Discorso alla Curia* 30, my translation).

Interreligious dialogue demands faithfulness to the truth from all those involved. This requires the rejection of relativism and syncretism thought to be pre-conditions for “sincere respect for others” and the “spirit of reconciliation and fraternity” that characterizes true dialogue (Benedict XVI, *Allocutio ad corpus* 76).

Respect for the other, according to Benedict XVI, also means “acceptance of their otherness” (*Ad parochos* 152, my translation). Authentic dialogue moves forward, however, from respect to deeper love. In Benedict’s words, dialogue “must also be evangelical, in the sense that its fundamental purpose is to help people live in love and ensure that this love is extended in every part of the world” (Ibid.). Dialogue does not exclude mission because Christians believe “that the Gospel is a great gift, the gift of great love, of great truth, which we cannot only keep to ourselves alone” (Ibid.,152-153). God’s gift is to be shared with others in the awareness that “God gives them the necessary freedom and light to find the truth” (Ibid.). Thus, far from becoming an imposition, mission is the offering of God’s gift, “leaving it to his goodness to enlighten people so that the gift of concrete friendship with the God with a human face may be extended” (Ibid.).

Benedict XVI believes that “the presence of [Christian] faith in the world is a positive element” and, reporting what some exponent of non-Christian re-

ligions told him personally, “the presence of Christianity is a point of reference” for them even though they do not convert (Ibid.,153). Regarding conversion, Benedict XVI points out that for Paul the Apostle, the pre-condition for the *parousia* is not the conversion of every single person, but the universal proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore, as we proclaim Christ, “we indeed desire the conversion of all but allow the Lord to be the one who acts,” leaving in his hands people’s decision to embrace the faith or not. The possibility of conversion, however, must not be excluded a priori in the name of freedom. It is crucial that people “who wish to convert have the possibility to do so and that the Lord’s light appears over the world as a reference for everyone and a light that helps, without which the world cannot find itself.” The purpose of mission is to offer that possibility (Ibid.).

Ultimately, both dialogue and mission are a matter of truth and love, and as such they are not mutually exclusive but support each other (*Ad parochos* 153). While Catholic official teaching affirms that the contradiction between mission and interreligious dialogue is only apparent, articulating their relationship has been a major concern for theologians in recent decades (DM; DP).¹¹ It is worth repeating that, for Ratzinger, the dialogue-proclamation tension becomes a real theological problem when it is approached from a limiting perspective, namely the question of the salvific value of other religions. The theological impasse is overcome if both evangelisations and interreligious dialogue are understood in relation to truth, which brings the two together at the level of their essence.

5. Interreligious dialogue as service to humanity

It has already been pointed out that Benedict XVI considers interreligious dialogue as a service to humanity that followers of all religions are called to offer jointly, on account of the responsibility deriving from the nature of their respective religions. Pope Benedict insists that interreligious dialogue is important not only for those directly involved in it but also for wider society. In Washington, for example, he suggested that this is evident from the positive effects of the “long history of cooperation” among religious communities in the public life of the United States of America. Interreligious engagement

¹¹ Among the contributions see, from the Catholic perspective, the work of Michael Barnes. In “Discernere L’istinto Cattolico,” Barnes shows that the connection between mission and interreligious dialogue is intrinsic to the Catholic spirit. From a Protestant perspective, David Morgan Lochhead (United Church of Canada) argued that if both Gospel proclamation and interreligious dialogue are understood as story-telling, they are not contradictory but in fact belong together (*The Dialogical Imperative* 77-88).

enables followers of different religions to offer a shared witness to society and “enrich public life with the spiritual values that motivate their action in the world” (*Address in Washington* 327). Interreligious dialogue “sustains and nourishes the surrounding culture in the present day.” By growing in mutual understanding “we see that we share an esteem for ethical values, discernible to human reason, which are revered by people of goodwill” and, by doing so, we answer the need of a world that “begs for a common witness to these values” (*Ibid.*,328).

Ultimately, by engaging in mutual “dialogue and cooperation” (Name 2), followers of different faiths can jointly “inspire all people to ponder the deeper questions of their origin and destiny” (*Address in Washington* 330). In this way, interreligious dialogue truly becomes “a way of serving society at large” (*Ibid.*,328). In this sense, Benedict describes it in terms of “building bridges of friendship with the followers of other religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole” (*Address to the Delegates* 743).

6. Interreligious dialogue as imperative for the Church

Interreligious dialogue properly understood is, for Benedict XVI, “an irreversible venture for the Catholic Church” (*Address to Pekka Ojanen*). Authentic dialogue that stems from fidelity to the truth requires the Church, and members who engage in it, to bring to the forum of interreligious dialogue Jesus of Nazareth, who came to “reconcile man to God and reveal the underlying reason of all things” (*Address in Washington* 330). In authentic Christian interreligious engagement, the fact that Christians bring Christ into the conversation, as the revelation of the truth, is not a denial of the value of another’s religion.

Moreover, for Christians, the mystery of Christ is present in interreligious dialogue not only as *content* but also as *causa prima*, that is to say, as the ultimate reason for the engagement, as they are *spurred* precisely by the “ardent desire to follow” Christ to “open their minds and hearts in dialogue” (*Address in Washington* 330).

Finally, Christian engagement in dialogue with followers of other religions is “motivated by charity.” The Church enters dialogue with the profound conviction that the truth is fully revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who “fully discloses the human potential for virtue and goodness, and ... liberates us from sin and darkness” (*Address in Sydney*). This does not exclude the possibility that the Church may learn from others. In fact, while engaging in the conversation, it “eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions,” because it believes that “all religions aim to penetrate

the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an origin or principle outside itself.” Religions seek to “understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle, and Christians believe that God has revealed this origin and principle in Jesus” (Ibid.).

D. Conclusions

The quest for the truth is the origin and goal of interreligious dialogue in all its forms and, therefore, obedience to the truth determines the attitudes required by interreligious dialogue. These attitudes are: first, mutual respect for each other, for each other’s religious beliefs and experiences, for the freedom to express one’s convictions; second, an eager interest in what the other has to contribute, on the basis of their religious experience, including their perception of the Absolute; third, a spirit of reconciliation and fraternal love; and, lastly, a disposition to work together for the protection and the promotion of human life and freedom. Interreligious dialogue is carried out in the awareness that obedience to the truth means being charged with the task of serving humanity by orienting it towards the transcendent origin and destiny from which it receives its deepest meaning.

Commenting on Catholic teaching in general and on Benedict XVI in particular, Stratford Caldecott distinguishes between *deep* and *shallow* versions of interreligious dialogue. While the latter “glosses over differences for the sake of superficial or pragmatic friendliness,” in the former “the follower of one religion approaches the follower of another in full fidelity to his own distinct identity, but with the willingness to seek the truth that transcends, aspects of which can be discovered by the other” (Caldecott 203). Benedict XVI has unambiguously challenged the Catholic Church, all Christians and people of every faith to engage courageously in *deep* interreligious dialogue.

The aim of this survey was to show that, starting from ecclesiology, Ratzinger-Benedict XVI has suggested a notion of dialogue that is fully harmonious with the Church’s mission. The foundation of interreligious dialogue as a legitimate and necessary aspect of mission is the very being of One Church, as a sign and instrument for the unity of humanity. To a certain extent, the Church’s unity with God is extended to religious-humanity through the interreligious conversation, by which the followers of other faiths – in ways known to God (*Gaudium et Spes* 22) – can somehow share in the Church’s salvific communion with God. Obviously, such participation is partial and indirect, because the explicit proclamation of the good news of Christ and the invitation to become members of his Church constitute the ultimate goal of mission. The theological value of unity that is the fruit of interreligious dialogue, how-

ever, is not to be underestimated. First, interreligious dialogue is a necessary premise for the proclamation of the Gospel to the followers of other religions, because authentic Christian proclamation can only take place once a relationship of mutual trust has been established between the speaker and the hearer. Second, in situations where direct proclamation is not possible, which is a scenario contemplated by the Church, the unity achieved through authentic interreligious dialogue could be the highest achievable degree of unity between God and people in those particular circumstances (DP 78, 84).

Benedict XVI's understanding of interreligious dialogue contributes significantly to theological reflection as it provides a way out of a deadlock. When the question of the salvific value of the religion is taken as the starting point, interreligious dialogue comes to a dead-end, because it must then be concluded that either those religions have no salvific value and therefore are irrelevant, or that they do, and therefore that they are alternative paths of salvation alongside the Church. In both cases, interreligious dialogue loses its meaning. So, the question of the salvific value of religions cannot provide adequate theological motivations for an engagement in interreligious dialogue.¹²

Conversely, Benedict XVI's ecclesiological notion of interreligious dialogue does not require renouncing the uniqueness of the Church, because it derives from it. As a result, the most significant reason why a significant number of Christians are sceptical about interreligious dialogue ceases to be. In this sense, Benedict XVI's ecclesiology contributes to a deeper comprehension of the Catholic concept of interreligious dialogue by promoting a stronger commitment to it as a necessary expression of the Church's work for the salvation of humanity.

ABSTRACT

Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholic teaching has placed great emphasis on interreligious dialogue as an integral aspect of the Church's mission. However there remains a tension between interreligious dialogue and the church's duty of proclaiming the gospel that constantly calls for clarification. By articulating the ecclesiological foundations of interreligious dialogue, Benedict XVI has significantly contributed to clarify the Catholic understanding of its nature and characteristics, and also suggested concrete ways in which Christians and the followers of other religions are called to engage in constructive dialogue for the good of the whole of humanity.

¹² The debate has generated a vast literature. From the Catholic perspective, for an overview of the fundamental questions and further bibliography, see the work of Jacques Dupuis and Gavin D'Costa (for example, Dupuis, *Toward*; D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness*).

Keywords: Benedict XVI; Catholic Church; Ecclesiology; Interreligious Dialogue; Magisterium

Słowa kluczowe: Benedykt XVI, Kościół katolicki, eklezjologia, dialog międzyreligijny, Magisterium

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 NAcSecond Vatican Council. *Nostra Aetate (28 October 1965)*.
 DM Secretariatus Pro Non Christianis. *Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione (10 June 1984)*.
 LG Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium (21 November 1964)*.

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